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AUTOGRAPHS

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25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

Few fields in autograph collecting have attracted as wide interest as has the Civil War. Its personalities pose to the collector the same fascination that they do to the scholar; moreover, with a few exceptions—such as Lincoln and “Stonewall” Jackson—letters of the Civil War leaders are fairly readily obtainable.

In general, important Confederate autographs are harder to come by than comparable Union material. This situation stems in part from the destruction of many Confederate records, but also from the fact that so many top Confederate soldiers died in battle. By way of contrast, postwar letters of Union stalwarts such as Sherman, Sheridan and Hooker can be had for a few dollars.

Many documents of the war period tell a fascinating story. Illustrated here is one of several endorsements on a document, circulated in April, 1864, concerning a Confederate captain charged with harboring deserters.

The specifications against the captain traveled, in the space of five days, from his regimental commander to four Confederate generals. Brig. Gen. George Steuart urged, in the first endorsement, that the captain be courtmartialed “as soon as possible.” Maj. Gen. Edward Johnson urged that he be tried by the corps court then in session. Second Corps Commander Gen. Richard Ewell concurred. But because of certain considerations of morale, the case went “to the top”—General Robert E. Lee.

For all this process to have

been accomplished between April 25 and 29 suggests good staff work, although one may ask whether Gen. Lee should have been bothered on a disciplinary matter of this sort. That he was bothered is illustrative of the serious desertion problem which afflicted Lee’s army during its last year in the field.

Members of the Manuscript Society, who have prepared this series of articles, will attempt to answer readers’ queries concerning autographs. These may be addressed to John M. Taylor, 4009 Lorraine avenue, Falls Church, Va.